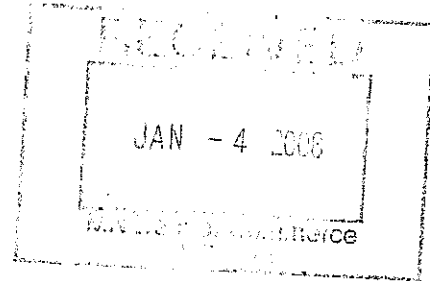


Sarah Copeland  
902 Northwest Third Avenue  
Grand Rapids, Minnesota 55744

December 15, 2007

Mr. Bill Storm  
Minnesota Department of Commerce  
85 Seventh Place East; Suite 500  
St. Paul, MN 55101



Dear Mr. Storm:

- Minnesota is known as an innovative and progressive state.
- Northern Minnesota is known as a beautiful, natural playground.
- The Iron Range is known as a severely depressed community with the state's highest unemployment and poverty rates.

When I first heard about the possibility that substantial numbers of jobs might come to the Taconite community, I was thrilled. This would make a huge impact on the entire Iron Range area. If a business could create 100 middle-class level jobs, the presence of those jobs creates more jobs. Then I found out that the business was coal-based. What are we thinking?

This 'new' coal gasification plant has placed a terrible rift throughout our communities based on only 2 factors: jobs and the environment. You either want jobs, or you want to save the environment. If you are interested in providing jobs for this extremely poverty-stricken and working-poor area, then you probably dump used motor oil in your local lake. If you are concerned about the amount of toxic and hazardous waste that this plant will dump into our air and water supply, then you are obviously a rich, tree-hugging snob who thinks that the environment is more important than human beings. This is an absurd mentality; and yet it is proliferating. (It is even more absurd to hear the grumbling as a massive windmill blade is being trucked through town.)

- Minnesota is known as an innovative and progressive state.

We are better than this. We are smarter than this. In the world today, with what we know and where our nation wants to be in the future, I find it unbelievable that anyone would consider building a "new" energy plant that uses fossil fuels. Regardless of what companies say they can do or reduce, it is backward thinking to build new with fossil fuels in mind. We need to get off the crack.

We need real, innovative and progressive solutions on the Iron Range. The best use of taxpayer money would be to select businesses that provide solar, wind or other sustainable or renewable energy sources. Northern Minnesota is placing workforce development as a huge priority for our region. We need help investing in people and companies that want to work for the future.

Here's a thought: In the DEIS (Volume 1) dated November 2007, section 1.3.2, under DOE Proposed Action, it states that \$36 million of taxpayer money will be used to co-fund just the design and one-year operational demonstration of the Mesaba Energy project. A portion, over \$22 million has already

been made available for cost sharing. That is a substantial amount of money. Look at how much state and federal money has already been spent just attending meetings and developing this DEIS.

There are many areas in these reports that talk about alternative actions. If we decided to only spend \$20,000,000 on an energy project for the Iron range area, what could we accomplish? (A large corporation would require the state to provide more incentive than \$20 million.) However, we could provide a between 1,070 and 2,516 full-sized homes with solar panels that would adequately supply their winter electric needs, and provide excess energy in the summer to sell back to the electric company. On the average, this would mean clean, free energy for approximately 6,038 Iron Range residents. Conservation Technologies, located in Duluth, MN, makes solar panels that could be used, keeping state tax money in our state. Can you imagine what this would mean if the state spent the same amount of money as they are planning for this coal-based project? (Is the coal-based project going to provide free energy? It certainly isn't clean energy.)

Have one of our state's economists map the equations out using the money multiplier. The impact on this entire region would be phenomenal. As a huge bonus, there is no need for additional environmental impact statements. Only positive results would come from this action. We need to think. Think smart.

This is actually a fantastic opportunity for the entire state of Minnesota. Do we want to continue to be on the forefront of technology and innovation? Whether it is wind farms, or solar panels or ethanol from prairie grasses or other biomass (much more productive than corn) the Iron Range has the potential of being the shining star of our entire nation.

"Wow, look what they did up in Northern Minnesota! They turned a severely depressed Iron Range into a vibrant community. They have low unemployment, an abundance of free and clean energy, and they are working on an unbelievable public transportation system. The air is clean and the skies are blue. I heard you can even drink the water right out of the lakes!"

Is this only some dream? I don't think so. I invite you to come and spend some time up here on the Iron Range. Visit the local diners. Talk to the miners. Take the time to do some cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. Stand out in the middle of a frozen lake at about 9:00 at night. Check out the Northern Lights dancing across the sky. Listen. (I personally prefer doing this in a boat during the summer when the loons are present.) Don't wait very long to make the trip though, – people are waiting in line to dump hazardous waste in our air, lakes and groundwater supply – and the government is paying for them to do it.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter,



Sarah E. Copeland